

VZCZCXRO4694
RR RUEHHM
DE RUEHHI #2305/01 2510818
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 080818Z SEP 06
FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3328
INFO RUEHPF/AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH 3589
RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 1768

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 002305

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL/AWH, PRM/ANE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/08/2106

TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM PREF VM

SUBJECT: CENTRAL HIGHLANDS: POINTS TO RAISE WITH THE GVN ON ETHNIC MINORITY CRACKDOWN

REF: A. 9/1/06 SILBERSTEIN E-MAIL

¶B. HCMC 917

Classified By: DCM Jon Aloisi per 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (U) Action Request. See paragraph 5. This request was coordinated with ConGen HCMC (Ref A).

Summary

¶2. (C) Mission Vietnam is concerned about an up-tick in police activities directed against ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands who are in cellular telephone contact with relatives and others in the United States. In a recent case (Ref B), an individual mistakenly suspected of belonging to a Dega separatist group was arrested, and subsequently died in police custody, after communicating by cell phone with relatives in the United States. Vietnamese security officials appear concerned that certain U.S.-based groups are in contact with Dega separatists and are encouraging them to organize protests in the Central Highlands in advance of APEC and the President's visit. Mission Vietnam recommends delivering points to GVN interlocutors in Hanoi, HCMC and Washington that urge Vietnam to: recognize that increased contact between ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands and their relatives in the United States is natural and should not be construed as a threat to Vietnam's sovereignty and territorial integrity; protect the rights of those arrested on suspicion of separatist activities; punish those officials who are responsible for violating these rights; and, share information with the USG on the Dega phenomenon and possible separatist activities. End Summary.

Background

¶3. (C) Contacts throughout the Central Highlands provinces of Dak Lak, Gia Lai and Dak Nong informed ConGen HCMC that local police have intensified operations against whom they see as "Dega" separatists. In all three provinces, security officials are reportedly confiscating cell phones from ethnic minorities and detaining at least some people who are communicating with the ethnic minority community in the United States. The reason for this, we have heard anecdotally, is that the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) is concerned about U.S.-based groups seeking to organize ethnic minority protests in the Central Highlands in advance of APEC and the President's visit in November.

¶4. (C) A reliable source informed ConGen HCMC that an ethnic minority individual who reportedly died in police custody in Dak Lak Province (Ref B) was picked up after speaking on his cell phone to two family members in the United States to ask

for money. He died during the first day of interrogation. This contact confirmed that the police gave the family VND 15 million (approximately USD 937) in compensation. This contact also was emphatic that the individual who died in custody did not have any contact with Dega elements.

Suggested Points

15. (C) As more ethnic minorities settle in the United States under the Visas-93 program, there naturally will be increased communication with friends and family back home. Confiscation of cell phones, harsh interrogations and prolonged detentions will lead to further abuses, like the death in Dak Lak. Mission Vietnam suggests that Embassy Hanoi, ConGen HCMC and the Department raise the following points with our GVN interlocutors:

-- The USG supports Vietnam's sovereignty and territorial integrity and opposes the use of violence to change Vietnam's political system.

-- While we understand that there is a potential security threat from Dega operatives in the Central Highlands, and that there is communication between them and some members of the ethnic minority community in the United States, the vast majority of communication between this community and family members in Vietnam is routine and not a security threat. Even as Vietnam attempts to deal with separatism, it should not try to stem these normal family ties.

-- Moreover, those arrested on suspicion of support for separatism need to have their legal rights respected, including being given access to a lawyer and their families. Officials in the Central Highlands must be instructed that

HANOI 00002305 002 OF 002

physical abuse of detainees is out of the question. Those that violate these precepts, such as those responsible for the recent death of an ethnic minority person in police custody in Dak Lak, must be punished.

-- The USG needs to have a better understanding of the Dega phenomenon. We have begun to have useful exchanges on the issue, such as during the HCMC Consul General's July discussion with Dak Lak provincial security officials. However, we would like to expand on this by receiving concrete information on the activities of Dega separatists in Vietnam and the linkages between these individuals and the ethnic minority community in the United States.

-- The MPS officials in Dak Lak told us that they have provided transcripts of intercepts and other data to the MPS in Hanoi to share with the USG. However, we have not yet seen this information, but would very much welcome the opportunity to review it.

MARINE